

New Testament Responses to Violence (EMB2801)

FINAL SYLLABUS

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Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, 13:30 to 16:30 (June 17 to June 27)

Rationale

A variety of recent political events have confronted students of theology with the spectre of violence in recent years, inevitably raising the question of how to engage the issue theologically. This course will aid students’ engagement with various forms of violence (imperial, gender, economic, etc.) through the various New Testament authors and their own dealings with the issues. Indeed, insofar as the Bible is accorded significant political value, it is vital – regardless of one’s own religious proclivities – to understand what the texts contained in the New Testament have to report on these issues in their own era.

Aims

This course surveys various ways in which New Testament authors encountered violence. It aims to acquaint students with the social world of the New Testament, to familiarize students in major issues in the study of the New Testament, and to aid students in the development of a biblical hermeneutic conscious of its implications.

Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- articulate the distinctive stances a number of New Testament writers toward various forms of violence
- describe the ways in which imperial violence was experienced by a number of New Testament authors and its relationship to social class, gender, geography, and other aspects of their social location
- comment on important points of contact and difference between ancient and contemporary forms of violence
- discuss in considerable depth one particular intersection between a text of the New Testament and the practice of violence

Methods of Instruction

- daily lectures
- daily readings
- group discussions
- written assignments

Required Textbooks

- see Book Review assignment
- scholarly study bible (e.g., *HarperCollins Study Bible*, *New Oxford Annotated Bible*)
- daily readings will be available for download via Blackboard

Student Assessment

- Book Review (Session 1): 15%
- Opinion Paper (Session 5): 15%
- Research Paper (three weeks after Session 8): 60%
- classroom participation: 10%

Advance Preparation

- see Book Review assignment

Accommodations

Students with diverse learning styles are welcome in this course. If you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, I invite you to approach the instructor and/or the Accessibility Office as soon as soon as possible.

Attendance Policy

Quoted from *Emmanuel College Policies and Procedures*: “Academic credit for a course requires regular class attendance, unless otherwise indicated in the course syllabus. Attendance means being present in the class for the entire scheduled class meeting, not just part of it. In the event of absence for any reason including sickness, students are responsible for any information or class content missed. Students are expected to inform the instructor prior to class. The instructor may require additional work to make up for an absence. The instructor will be required to inform the Basic Degree Committee if students miss two classes. For students who miss two classes, this may result in a lower grade or even a failing grade for the course. If attendance is poor due to extenuating circumstances, students may petition the Basic Degree Committee to drop a course without academic or financial penalty.”

Part 1: The Gospels and the Military

Session 1: The Empire and the Holy Land, 66 BCE—136 CE

- This session will cover the history of the Holy Land from its conquest by Rome to the end of the Second Judaeen War
- Required Reading: See Book Review assignment
- **Book Review due**

Session 2: The Centurion at Capernaum and His Slave

- This session will involve discussion of Jennings’ work on the centurion’s slave in light of military masculinity and ancient constructions of gender
- Required Readings: Matt 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10; Jennings (extract)
- Suggested Reading: Saddington

Session 3: “Legion” and the Gerasene Demoniac

- This session will involve discussion of the possible imperial subtext regarding “Legion” in the Exorcism of the Gerasene Demoniac
- Required Readings: Mark 5:1–20; Horsley (extract)

- Suggested Reading: Kim (extract); Luke 8:26–39

Session 4: The Execution of Jesus

- This session will involve discussion of the Gospel authors' distinctive depictions of Judaeen administrators in the execution of Jesus, as well as the social importance of crucifixion
- Required Readings: Gospel readings to be assigned; Crossan (extract)
- It is suggested you bring a four-Gospel synopsis to class if you have one (e.g., Aland, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*)

Part II: Experiencing Violence Through the Apostle

Session 5: Paul in Prison

- This session will involve discussion of literary depictions of prison life in antiquity and cover both aristocratic and impoverished prisoners
- Required Readings: Acts readings to be assigned; Phlp 1:1—3:1, 4:10–20; Wansink (extract)
- **First Opinion Paper due**

Session 6: Imperial Economics in Paul's Letters

- This session will involve discussion of the “Jerusalem Collection” with respect to Roman economic praxis
- Required Readings: Rom 15:14–32; Friesen
- Suggested Reading: Žižek (extract); 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8:1–9:15

Session 7: Women and the Question of Pauline Authenticity

- This session will involve discussion of the treatment of women in the Pauline Corpus
- Required Readings: 1 Tim 5:1–25; MacDonald
- Suggested Readings: 1 Cor 7:25–40; Col 3:18—4:1; Eph 5:22—6:9

Part III: Contemporary Readings of Violence

Session 8: Jesus in an Age of Terror

- This session will cover the role of the New Testament in contemporary identity formation and the connection of its study to contemporary politics; it will also prepare you for the Research Paper
- This session will also have a component with Emmanuel College Librarian Karen Wishart to cover the basics of scholarly research for the Research Paper.
- Required Reading: Arnal (extract)
- Suggested Reading: Crossley

Research Paper due three weeks after Session 8

Book Review

- Please note that this assignment will require reading and writing before the first session.
- Read and compose a review of *one* book from the list below that is 3 pages long (double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman, one inch margins). In addition to summarizing the contents and expressing your opinion of the book, the review should address the following questions.
 - According to the book’s author, what aspects of the Roman Empire are most important for understanding the New Testament (e.g., economics, administration, military)?
 - How do New Testament figures resist or act antagonistically toward the Roman Empire? What biblical texts are most important for understanding this?
 - What is the political message the author wants you to take away from the New Testament; what is the connection between the biblical message and the author’s own context today?
- Guidelines for book reviews can be found here:
<http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~kloppen/gradingbr.htm>
- The following books are acceptable for review; select only one for the assignment.
 - Borg, Marcus J. *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teaching, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.
 - Crossan, John Dominic. *God and Empire: Jesus against Rome, Then and Now*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2007.
 - Horsley, Richard A. *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003.
 - Oakman, Douglas E. *The Political Aims of Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012.

Opinion Paper

- This should summarize in the student’s own words their thoughts on a given day’s discussion. It should serve to clarify what precisely the student thinks is “going on” with respect to a given passage. It should draw upon and nuance both classroom discussions and assigned readings on the topic.
- The opinion paper must interact with suggested reading if there is any for the date chosen.
- It should be 3 pages long (double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman, one inch margins).

Research Paper

- This paper should present research into one particular biblical passage addressing imperial violence. This may be either a theme from class or a new topic. If it is a class theme, it cannot be the same as the student’s Opinion Paper.
- In addition to providing an analysis of the passage and a critical engagement with scholarly publications, the paper should answer the following questions.
 - How does state violence of the Roman Empire figure into the passage?
 - How does the author present the relationship between early Christians and the Roman Empire (e.g., open hostility, passive aggression, acquiescence)?
- This paper is to be 7–10 pages long (double-spaced, 12 point Times New Roman, one inch margins) and include at least five academic sources beyond the required and suggested reading (including at least one academic commentary, one peer-reviewed

article, and one academic monograph); no scholarly sources published before 1994 should be used unless approved by the instructor.

- The Research Paper's topic should be produced in consultation with the instructor. Preliminary bibliographies on many relevant topics are available from the instructor.
- This paper requires a bibliography at the end, which provides complete citations for all scholarly sources cited. The bibliography does *not* count toward the page count.
- Be aware that the topic does not need to be one of the lecture topics: there are numerous texts dealing with state violence in the New Testament (e.g., John 7:53—8:11, Revelation's vision of the Empire, Romans 13) and many of these would make great papers!

Bibliography of Required and Suggested Readings

- Arnal, William E. *The Symbolic Jesus: Historical Scholarship, Judaism and the Construction of Contemporary Identity*. Religion in Culture: Studies in Social Contest & Construction. London: Equinox, 2005.
- Crossan, John Dominic. *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.
- Crossley, James G. "Jesus the Jew since 1967." Pages 111-129 in *Jesus beyond Nationalism: Constructing the Historical Jesus in a Period of Cultural Complexity*. Edited by Halvor Moxnes, Ward Blanton, and James G. Crossley. BibleWorld. London: Equinox, 2009.
- Friesen, Steven J. "Paul and Economics: The Jerusalem Collection as an Alternative to Patronage." Pages 27-54 in *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle*. Edited by Mark Douglas Given. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010.
- Horsley, Richard A. *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Jennings, Theodore W., Jr. *The Man Jesus Loved: Homoerotic Narratives from the New Testament*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2003.
- Kim, Seyoon. *Christ and Caesar: The Gospel and the Roman Empire in the Writings of Paul and Luke*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
- MacDonald, Margaret Y. "Reading the New Testament Household Codes in Light of New Research on Children and Childhood in the Roman World." *Studies in Religion* 41 (2012) 376–387.
- Meggitt, Justin J. "The Madness of King Jesus: Why Was Jesus Put to Death, but His Followers Were Not?" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29 (2007): 379-413.
- Saddington, Denis B. "The Centurion in Matthew 8:5-13: Consideration of the Proposal of Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., and Tat-Siong Benny Liew." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125 (2006): 140–142.
- Wansink, Craig S. *Chained in Christ: The Experience and Rhetoric of Paul's Imprisonments*. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 130. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. Big Ideas//Small Books. New York: Picador, 2008.